

The Who, What, When, Where and Why of Folic Acid!

Who needs Folic Acid?

If you are capable of getting pregnant, you need folic acid!

What is it?

Folic Acid is a B vitamin. It is used in our bodies to make new cells.

Where can you get it?

The simplest way to get folic acid is to take a multivitamin. Multivitamins are loaded with nutrients that may help keep your bones strong, and protect against heart disease and some cancers. For women, a multivitamin that contains folic acid is especially important. A daily multivitamin containing 400 micrograms of folic acid helps reduce the risk of serious birth defects of the brain and spine called neural tube defects (NTDs).

When do women need it?

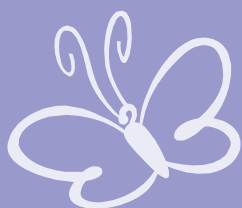
Now! Every day!

Why do you need it?

Neural tube defects (NTDs) like spina bifida and anencephaly happen during the first month of pregnancy. That's before most women even know they are pregnant. Spina bifida, the leading cause of childhood paralysis, occurs when the spinal column fails to close properly. With anencephaly the brain fails to develop completely or is entirely absent. Anencephaly is always fatal. NTDs are serious defects. The good news is that 50 to 70 percent of NTDs may be prevented if women consume the recommended amount folic acid.

Increased consumption of folic acid is making a difference. Since 1998 when food manufacturers added folic acid to enriched grain products, the number of babies born with spina bifida and anencephaly declined 27 percent in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), publishers of this data, this means 1,000 fewer babies are affected by these birth defects each year. Even more babies could enjoy life without NTDs if all childbearing age women consumed 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.





There's Still More You Need to Know!

Not ready for a baby yet?

About half of all pregnancies are unplanned. Women need adequate folic acid every day so their bodies will be ready whenever pregnancy occurs. To prevent NTDs the CDC recommends taking a multivitamin one month before and during the early weeks of pregnancy. Even if you aren't planning a pregnancy, start the folic acid habit now. There are lots of good reasons to take a multivitamin. Preventing birth defects is just one of them.

Have problems taking a multivitamin?

If swallowing pills is hard for you, buy chewable multivitamins instead. Can't remember to take your vitamins? Put the bottle where you are likely to see it – next to your toothbrush, on the kitchen counter, with your car keys. Take them the same time everyday. If cost is a factor, buy generic brands and watch for coupons and specials.

Are there other ways to get folic acid?

Absolutely! Many breakfast cereals and some other foods are super-fortified with 400 micrograms of folic acid in a serving. Look for 100 percent of the Daily Value for folic acid on the label (100 % DV). Enriched grain products have extra folic acid added to them. Breads, pasta, grits, cereals and rice are part of this group.



The following are good sources of folate, the form of folic acid found in food:

- Dried beans and peas

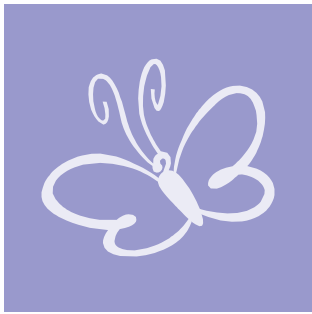
- Juices – orange, pineapple, tomato

- Fruits – oranges, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, avocado

- Vegetables – green leafy vegetables such as spinach, turnip greens, and collard greens; broccoli; lima beans; romaine lettuce; and asparagus



Although folic acid is found in many foods, it is difficult to get enough folic acid from diet alone. That's why the Institute of Medicine recommends that women who can become pregnant consume 400 micrograms of folic acid every day **in addition** to eating a healthy diet. A multivitamin or food containing 100 percent of the Daily Value for folic acid provides the amount recommended by experts.



Are you taking medications that impact your need for folic acid?

Certain medications or health conditions put you at higher risk for having a baby with an NTD. Phenytoin, an oral and injected anti-seizure medication, and methotrexate, an oral and injected antimetabolite drug used for cancer treatment,



psoriasis, and rheumatoid arthritis, are examples of two medications that increase your need for supplemental folic acid. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

Have you already had a pregnancy affected by an NTD?

If you have had a previous pregnancy affected by an NTD you are at high risk for another NTD affected pregnancy. It is very important to talk with your doctor about how to get the increased amount of folic acid right for you.

